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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 4527
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 9443
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 3613
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 5556
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 7315
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002063

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXO
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Major Israeli media (lead story in The Jerusalem Post) quoted Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri as saying on Wednesday that the release of kidnapped BBC correspondent Alan Johnston sends a message to Israel that the Islamist movement is prepared to strike a deal for abducted

IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit. The Jerusalem Post quoted an official in the Prime Minister's Office as saying that Israel welcomed Johnston's safe return, but that "Hamas cannot masquerade as anything else but the terrorist organization whose members continue to hold our captive son, Gilad Shalit." Abu Mutfana -- a leader in the Army of Islam, the group that kidnapped Johnston -- was quoted as saying on Wednesday in an interview broadcast on Channel 10-TV that Shalit's kidnappers have transferred him to the custody of Hamas, because the Army of Islam had been "busy with other things." However, a Channel 10-TV commentator said that Hamas had offered Abu Mutfana's group money and weapons in exchange for Shalit. Media reported that far-right groups demand that Jews who were convicted of murdering Arabs, or Haggai Amir who conspired with his brother Yigal to assassinate Yitzhak Rabin, be freed as part of any deal to exchange terrorists for Shalit.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli and Palestinian government officials met on Monday to discuss renewing security cooperation, which essentially stopped in September 2000. According to Israeli sources, these talks could lead to a return of security control over West Bank areas to the PA. On Wednesday, Ha'aretz reported that IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday that over time PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas and the head of Hamas's political wing, Khaled Mashal will engage in dialog, and that there will be no separation between Gaza and the West Bank.

Electronic media reported that IDF troops operating in the Gaza Strip shot and killed at least four Palestinian gunmen overnight.

Ha'aretz and other major Israeli media quoted several Labor Party ministers as saying that Wednesday's cabinet reshuffle merely starts the countdown to the end of PM Ehud Olmert's term, and that newly appointed Vice Premier Haim Ramon will be the one who will lead the process. Yediot said that through the reshuffle, Olmert succeeded in forming the basis for future political struggles.

The electronic media reported that this morning Israel transferred four Jordanians convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment back to Jordan, where they will apparently be released in 18 months. On Wednesday the High Court of Justice rejected a petition to overrule the cabinet's decision.

On Wednesday Yediot cited a claim by the Syrian government newspaper Al-Thawra that Syria is preparing for war with Israel this summer. Earlier this week the Arabic-language Israel newspaper Assennara also carried this report.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli defense officials told the newspaper that Hamas's threat to open fire at Palestinians stranded in Egypt has thwarted Israeli plans to open the Kerem Shalom crossing to southern Gaza on Wednesday to let the travelers return to their homes.

The Jerusalem Post quoted a report issued on Wednesday by Gisha, the Legal Center for Freedom, as saying that the virtual isolation imposed on the Gaza Strip since Hamas's takeover in June has almost destroyed the Palestinian economy and that it threatens to turn its 1.4 million residents into charity cases.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a diplomatic source told the newspaper that Morocco wants to be more active in Middle East diplomacy and that its ties with Israel have deepened. The source was talking after the foreign ministers from the two countries met in Paris on Wednesday.

Citing AP, The Jerusalem Post quoted a "police official" as saying that Egyptian border guards shot a Sudanese refugee and arrested two others early on Wednesday as they tried to cross from Egypt into Israel. Twenty-six other refugees succeeded in illegally crossing the border.

Maariv reported that former NASA astronaut Neil Armstrong, who was the first man to walk on the moon, will soon visit Israel.

Maariv quoted Spanish authorities as saying on Wednesday that 1,100 rifles and guns were found on board a Nicaragua-bound ship originating from Haifa and anchoring in a southern Spanish port.

The Jerusalem Post published a Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) wire report as saying that following a string of conservative rulings in the closing weeks of this year's US Supreme Court session, some Jewish officials are suggesting they may be forced to abandon their decades-long strategy of relying on the courts to protect liberal gains on a host of issues

The Jerusalem Post printed a JTA wire report that several Jewish organizations have criticized the US Senate for failing to move forward on immigration reform.

Mideast:

Summary:

Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Abu Mazen called day and night for the release [of BBC correspondent Alan Johnston], but to no avail. And now, Hamas was the one that brought about his release."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "No one -- including the Arab states and Europe, let alone the US -- wants Hamas to succeed. So why is Israel sustaining Hamastan?"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The strategic environment is not promising in light of the split in the Palestinian Authority and the American veto of talks with Syria."

Diplomatic correspondent Uri Yablonka wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Israel's aspiration for a diplomatic arrangement in cooperation with Arab League countries has hit an impasse."

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz: "Would it occur to anyone to appoint Bush, on his retirement, as an envoy of the Quartet? Of course not. The same goes for his partner."

Block Quotes:

II. "Hamas's First Accomplishment"

Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (7/5): "Abu Mazen called day and night for the release [of BBC correspondent Alan Johnston], but to no avail. And now, Hamas was the one that brought about his release and is also arresting drug dealers and restoring personal safety to the Gaza residents. Johnston was in captivity when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip. After their victory, the Hamas leaders ordered his immediate release in order to show the West that it controls the Gaza Strip.... Hamas's PR display proved itself when both the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary praised its critical role in Johnston's release. Hamas was also aiming for praise from the old-new guy in the region, Quartet envoy Tony Blair, and the Europeans, whom they expect to lift the political and economic siege.... It became known on Wednesday that the British Foreign Office had requested that Israel allow a Palestinian wanted man who had found refuge in Jordan -- and who they believed could help the release efforts -- to enter the West Bank and from there go to Gaza.

Israel agreed. Gaza sources said on Wednesday that despite the difference between the kidnappings, it should be hoped that Johnston's release will help advance a deal to release Palestinian prisoners in return for soldier Gilad Shalit."

II. "Cut Off Hamas"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (7/5): "The release of kidnapped BBC journalist Alan Johnston is a happy occasion, especially given how differently such episodes have ended in the past. The contrast with another unprovoked kidnapping, however, could not be more stark: Hamas claims to have made Herculean efforts to release a hostage it did not hold, yet refuses to release Gilad Shalit, a hostage it took and does hold. The clear message Hamas is trying to convey by Johnston's release is that it is in charge.... The [Israeli] government claims it is doing

everything to secure Shalit's release. That is not true. In theory, Israel could bomb Gaza until Shalit is released and other demands are met. This is what other countries, including democracies, would do without batting an eyelash under similar circumstances.... We are not suggesting that Israel take actions that could cause [large] numbers of civilian casualties. But it is one thing for Israel to decide not to use 'disproportionate' and lethal force in self-defense and quite another to rule out even the range of non-lethal measures that our available to defend our interests.... No one -- including the Arab states and Europe, let alone the US -- wants Hamas to succeed. So why is Israel sustaining Hamastan?"

III. "The Government of Broken Dreams"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (7/5): "Someone who needs every cabinet vote to survive in his seat will not take chances with controversial decisions. In any case, the strategic environment is not promising in light of the split in the Palestinian Authority and the American veto of talks with Syria.... What can be achieved during this twilight period? The new Olmert government will have to create a cease-fire with Hamas in Gaza, under the aegis of the vain talk of 'strengthening Abu Mazen' in the West Bank; to rehabilitate the Israel Defense Forces, while being supremely careful to avoid a military confrontation with Syria; and to lead a national and international effort, together with Netanyahu, against the nuclear threat from Iran. Success will be measured in the preservation of economic stability and defense and in preventing problems and escalation on the borders. The initiatives, the changes and innovation will apparently be left to the next government."

IV. "Prime Minister Willing, But Saudis Admit: Saudi Initiative Is Dead"

Diplomatic correspondent Uri Yablonka wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (7/4): "Israel's aspiration for a diplomatic arrangement in cooperation with Arab League countries has hit an impasse. Senior political sources in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan have said in closed conversations with senior Israeli officials that the Saudi initiative, which Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had viewed as a basis for an agreement, is dead for now, and that, in effect, as long as the chaos in the PA continues, there is no point in pursuing this. These statements were made to senior political and security officials, in the security establishment and the Foreign Ministry. These, in effect, complete a series of indications and previous announcements by these countries in which they basically dissociate themselves, at least for now, from the Saudi initiative. According to the new principles of the Arab governments, Israel should bolster PA Chairman Abu Mazen, and any multilateral step should have the consent of all the countries in the Arab League.... Prime Minister [Olmert's] hope was that an agreement with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia would nail down the Palestinians and compel them to agree to a peace agreement. This was on the assumption that the bilateral channel with the Palestinians would not be making progress. At the beginning of May, weeks before Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni visited Cairo, where she met, among others, with President Hosni Mubarak. The achievement she obtained with him was apparently dramatic: for the first time, teams led by the foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan would come to Israel, in their roles as representatives of all the Arab League countries. Since then, officials in Israel have been waiting for the teams to arrive, but the Hamas takeover of Gaza and the new political situation of two Palestinian states, an extreme one in Gaza and a moderate one in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank], changed the situation.... According to Israel's analysis, Saudi Arabia is concerned that the isolation of Hamas and the continued boycott against it will further increase the alliance between Hamas and Iran. Because of concern over this alliance, the Saudis are completely removing their involvement in the process on the grounds that the right strategy must be a warm embrace between Fatah and Hamas and not the opposite."

IV. "Blair Go Home"

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz (7/5): "George Bush's international failures are also Blair's. Blair's beguiling smile cannot mitigate his responsibility for the state of the world

and for the pointless bloodshed fanned by the fatal Bush-Blair duo. Just as nobody would dream of expecting Bush, who is obstinately preventing any progress with Syria, to act for peace in the Middle East, nobody would expect his all too loyal ally to do so. Would it occur to anyone to appoint Bush, on his retirement, as an envoy of the Quartet? Of course not. The same goes for his partner."

JONES